

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 24, 2005

Mr. Peter Warwick  
President and CEO of Thompson West, Inc.  
610 Opperman Drive  
Eagan, MN 55123

Dear Mr. Warwick

As I mentioned to you on the phone earlier this month, I learned recently that Westlaw offers a service that creates a gaping hole that identity thieves could exploit to disastrous consequences.

In light of the recent debacle with ChoicePoint, where thousands of people's social security numbers fell into criminal hands because of lax standards at the company, I again urge you to take immediate action to correct your own company's problem.

Any Westlaw user who pays for your "People-Find" database can obtain the social security number of virtually any person in the United States. I reiterate my request that you immediately take down this service pending a full evaluation of the protocols used to determine who is authorized to access such information.

My office received a call from a constituent who works for the federal courts and happened upon this feature. She immediately contacted a member of my staff who confirmed that my office also has access to this feature. We have also learned that many companies (and their employees) subscribe to this service and have unfettered access to social security numbers.

When we called Westlaw, we learned that you offer this service to anyone who is willing to pay for it, regardless of their need for it and without even the most cursory background check. All users have to do is affirm they will use the information legally and they get everything they need to steal identities.

This search engine could be called "Identity Theft for Dummies." Criminals no longer need forage through dumpsters for discarded bills - they just need to send Westlaw a check and they're in business.

As you know, identity theft is a growing problem in our country and across the globe. It costs consumers and businesses an estimated five billion dollars per year. As e-commerce expands, so does identity theft.

When my staff spoke with your staff, and when I spoke directly with you, your company did not seem to appreciate the scope of this problem. Rather than receiving assurances that the problem would be remedied, my office received a letter on law firm stationery that failed to address the central issue - that there are no real standards for keeping sensitive personal data out of the wrong hands. I trust, now that I have brought this matter directly to your attention, your company recognizes the threats this service creates.

I hope you will immediately suspend the service to help protect against its improper use. I also ask that you work with my staff to identify the databases that are providing you with private social security numbers without putting adequate restrictions on your dissemination of those numbers.

I look forward to hearing from you promptly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Charles E. Schumer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "C" at the beginning.

Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator